

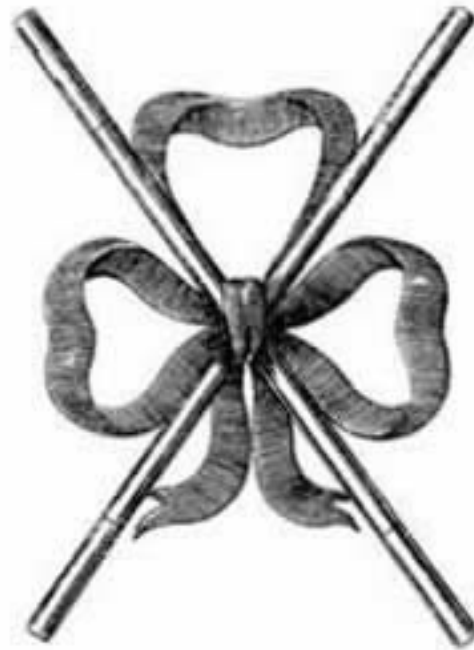


Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

“I appoint you my Director of Ceremonies”



“It affords me much pleasure to appoint you Director of Ceremonies of the Lodge and to invest you with the Collar and Jewel ; and to to hand you the wand of your Office. Your duty is to see that our Ceremonies are carried out with propriety and decorum, also to receive any distinguished Brethren and to ensure their receiving the honours due to them. I feel sure that I can rely on your assistance during my year and I congratulate you”

'I appoint you my Director of Ceremonies...'

The other evening some old hands were reflecting on DCs of yesteryear who, when we were the new boys, would shout, threaten, and bully (rather like a liverish National Service Drill Sergeant) in order to encourage a perfect ritual. Thirty years ago indeed I recall at one Stonehenge Installation a Deputy PrGM snapping at our DC to 'start it all again' when the 2nd Degree Salutations went awry. No DC wants *that* to happen twice in his life-time!

This train of thought had been started by a new brother who, at a recent meeting, had been given apparently contradictory advice about his ritual by two senior past masters – delivered somewhat robustly and, more sadly, *publicly*. 'Which one should I listen to', he asked me, in a rather bewildered manner – 'without appearing to upset the other?' This posed a number of questions. Is *perfect* accuracy in ritual still an *essential* goal in Freemasonry? Would its attainment justify marring the evening of a fellow Mason (and indeed of others within ear shot) for his perceived error?

Let me digress for a moment. May we accept that the ethos of Freemasonry flows on the one hand from Constitutions, convention and a centuries-long tradition and, on the other, from a Brotherly courtesy, warmth and kindness that cannot be taught? These twins, I suggest, should form the firm foundation for all our Masonic thinking. It follows, as we are a purely voluntary organisation, that for reasons both of convention and courtesy it is not for any of us to openly criticise another Brother. ('He without sin, first stone, etc.')

Now, returning to the Ritual. During his year the Master will normally appoint senior Masons to oversee all the key functions... and this includes the ritual. A wise WM does not try to tell any of them how to do their job – and may I suggest neither should other Lodge members! Thoughtful PMs will allow each Officer to discharge his responsibilities to the best of his ability – and each is normally very able, not least the DC

The DC has been given full responsibility for directing the Lodge ceremonies and the Lodge expects that – rather like the conductor of an orchestra – he will spell out in Rehearsal those standards of consistency and accuracy required to create a performance of, say, the Third Degree in which we can all take great pride. To discharge this responsibility properly *it is therefore for the DC and for the DC alone* to advise his team on standards, remedial errors and necessary changes. [Should other PMs differ strongly then these comments can best be expressed within the silent walls of the Lodge Committee Room - what is said there, stays there!]

The DC does not have it all his own way of course. A good DC may need to advise, cajole, encourage, enthuse, perhaps tease - but in seeking to achieve his standards he should never admonish publicly. He always keeps in mind *Freemasonry is recreational and that we are all volunteers. Remember too if others criticise a performer then by so doing they are criticising the DC's own standards – and possibly the Master who appointed him – so let us all be cautious. Thoughtless words may hurt the feelings of more than one person.*

[Interestingly the members of our LoI *elect* a Preceptor and his team to govern their affairs. The Master does not *appoint* them. This encourages Lodge members to accept kindly personal advice from the Preceptory team without rancour]

So there we have it. In today's Freemasonry we are all volunteers, doing our very best on a recreational night out. Even if the Old Hands know the words and role to perfection let us try to keep silent and leave it to the DC and those especially appointed to run the show that evening. We can just sit back and enjoy and, let us be honest, it might *actually* be better than in our day...

Michael Lee, CBE, PAGDC. Past Preceptor

1st March 2016